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ZNR UUUUU ZZH
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FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8525
INFO RUCNIAD/IGAD COLLECTIVE
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: AFRICOM COMMANDER MEETING WITH PRIME MINISTER

Summary

1. (SBU) In a brief November 8 meeting, Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles told AFRICOM Commander General Ward that he appreciated the establishment of AFRICOM and looked forward to working closely with the new command. General Ward noted Ethiopia's regional role, especially in Somalia, and welcomed the Prime Minister's statement that Ethiopia would not renew conflict with Eritrea over the border. Meles also appreciated the General's assurance of a seamless transition from CENTCOM to AFRICOM. We anticipate that Ethiopia will remain a reliable partner as we move forward through this transition. End Summary.

Participants

2. (SBU) General Ward was accompanied to the meeting with the Prime Minister by Ambassador Donald Yamamoto, Deputy Chief of Mission Deborah Malac, COL Dyfieri Harris, CDR Mark Swayne and Major Tom Shane (U.S. Embassy DAO).

Strong Support for AFRICOM

3. (SBU) Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles told visiting AFRICOM Commander General Ward on November 8 that Ethiopia welcomed the establishment of AFRICOM, noting it underscored U.S. commitment to the African continent. AFRICOM is an indication that the U.S. would be more involved in addressing African issues and resolving the previously confused U.S. command structure that split the continent between three different commands. With a single command, AFRICOM can integrate U.S. engagement across the continent.

4. (SBU) Meles noted that in earlier conversations he had raised his concern that the transition to AFRICOM might jeopardize the close relationship that Ethiopia has enjoyed with CENTCOM. He hoped that Ethiopia would be able to develop a similar relationship with AFRICOM. General Ward stressed that the transition would be seamless and smooth and that both commands would have frequent and strong interaction. General Ward also assured the Prime Minister that AFRICOM would continue to work closely with Ethiopia.

Ethiopia's Regional Role

5. (SBU) General Ward briefly reviewed Ethiopia's regional role and expressed his appreciation for Ethiopia's efforts to stabilize Somalia and strengthen President Yusuf's Transitional Federal Government. He noted the sacrifices made by Ethiopian troops in

Somalia and their role in providing force protection for AMISOM operations. General Ward also offered condolences for all fallen Ethiopian soldiers. On Sudan, where Prime Minister Meles and his Foreign Minister are taking an active role in mediating between President Bashir and the Government of Southern Sudan, the General expressed his support for Ethiopia's efforts.

Ethiopia-Eritrea Border

16. (SBU) The General thanked the Prime Minister for the restraint he had demonstrated regarding the Ethiopia-Eritrea border, noting Meles' recent comments that Ethiopian forces would not initiate renewed conflict with Eritrea. General Ward stressed that the U.S. and the international community urged both parties to do all they can to avert conflict and to reduce tensions. The Prime Minister reiterated Ethiopia's position and said the possibility of war was minimal despite recent press reports and Eritrean statements to the contrary.

Comment

17. (SBU) Prime Minister Meles views AFRICOM as an important commitment by the U.S. to address the challenges facing Africa. He seemed reassured by General Ward's pledge to ensure a seamless transition for Ethiopia from CENTCOM to AFRICOM responsibility. We anticipate that Ethiopia will remain a reliable partner as we move forward through this transition.

YAMAMOTO